

# 3 JOHN

## INTRODUCTION

The writer of this little epistle is John the apostle. I rather facetiously call this epistle "three-eyed John" because a very fine black preacher whom I knew years ago in the South called John's epistles "one-eyed John," "two-eyed John," and "three-eyed John." I don't know of a better way of remembering these epistles than this. This epistle, therefore, is "three-eyed John."

It is now the belief of some expositors that John wrote these epistles last -- after he wrote the Book of Revelation. I'm rather inclined to agree with that viewpoint. This means that these epistles were written close to the end of the first century, somewhere between B.C. 90-100, but it would be very difficult to date them exactly. John probably wrote all three epistles very close together. I don't think there would be much difference in time from one epistle to the other.

In his first epistle, John emphasizes the fact that the family of God is held together by love and that the little children are to love one another. He makes it very clear that if they don't love one another, they are not God's children. Children have a love for those who are in their family -- that is the normal thing even in natural relationships down here on this earth.

In the second epistle, however, John puts up a tremendous warning that there are apostates, there are many antichrists, and there are many deceivers in the world. He says that a child of God is not to love them. We are not to be concerned with their welfare in the sense of entertaining them in our homes. The child of God is to keep a very close account and to make sure that those he entertains, those he supports, are true to the Word of God; that is, that they believe in the deity of Christ, that they believe that He is God manifest in the flesh. John wrote, "And the Word was made flesh . . ." ([John 1:14](#)). He had already said that the Word was God. Therefore, Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh. He is God dwelling, tabernacling in human flesh. Until a person believes that, he doesn't have a Savior. If Jesus Christ is just a man and that is all that He is, we do not have a Savior. There is no reason to remember His birth and no reason to remember His death or resurrection if He is just a man. It is all-important to recognize that He is God manifest in the flesh and that His work on the Cross was a work that has power to save us. There is power in the blood because of who He is and because He died and rose again bodily. Those who deny these truths are not to be extended the fellowship or the support of the church. John goes so far in the second epistle as to say that believers are not to even bid such a person Godspeed. John said not to help him on his way or give him support. If you do, you are a partaker of his evil deeds, and you are a partner with him. Therefore, it behooves a child of God to know whom he supports.

As we come now to the third epistle, there is a similarity to John's second letter in some ways. It is very personal in character, and it carries the same theme of truth. Truth again is presented as all-important. When truth and love come into conflict, truth must survive. This means that you are not to love the false teacher. Walking in truth is all-important.

However, this third letter differs from the second in other ways. As you will note from the Outline which follows, this epistle deals with personalities. Also, in the second epistle, John says that the truth is worth standing for, but in this third epistle, John's emphasis is that the truth is worth working for. Someone has put it like this: "My life in God -- that's salvation. My life with God -- that's communion and fellowship. But my life for God -- that's service." This epistle deals with my life for God, and it has to do with walking and working in the truth. Love can become very sloppy; it can become misdirected, and it certainly can be misunderstood if it is not expressed within the boundary of truth.

## **Outline**

### **I. Gaius, Beloved Brother in the Early Church, [3John 1:1-8](#)**

(Gaius, the one to whom the letter is addressed, is urged to extend hospitality to true teachers of the Word.)

### **II. Diotrephes, "who loveth to have the preeminence," [3John 1:9-11](#)**

(Evil deeds are an expression of false doctrine.)

### **III. Demetrius "hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself," [3John 1:12-14](#)**

(A good life is an expression of true doctrine.)

Years ago I preached a sermon on the subject, "You Will Find Them in the Yellow Pages," in which I dealt with two men from this little epistle of Third John -- Diotrephes and Demetrius -- and with Demas whom Paul spoke of in [2Timothy 4:10](#) (see also [Col. 4:14](#); [Philem. 1:23-24](#)). Demas had been a fellow laborer with Paul but had deserted the work; he loved the world and departed from Paul. My sermon was about Demas, Diotrephes, and Demetrius -- each of their names begins with a D. I probably should have included Gaius who is also mentioned in this epistle -- and if his name had been Daius, I'm sure I would have!

Modern advertising tells us that we can always find it in the Yellow Pages. It does not matter whether you want to purchase an aardvark or a zebra, an atom splitter or a zymometer, an abacus or a zygote, you will find it in the Yellow Pages. If we could get ahold of the Yellow Pages of the Roman Empire in the first century, we would probably find these men listed there. However, we do find them in the Word of God, and they give us the answer to some very interesting questions. How did the believers of the first century make out? How were they holding out at the close of the first century? Did they all become martyrs? Were they all paragons of virtue? Were they all worthy followers of Christ? Were they worthy examples of the faith? Among the millions who turned to Christ in the first three centuries, how did the average believer turn out? Well, here in this epistle we find two who were outstanding men of God -- Gaius and Demetrius. These men really stood for the faith of God. We also find one who was not outstanding. Diotrephes was not standing at all; he was doing anything but standing for the truth.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Gaius -- A Delightful Brother (1:1-8)**

The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth  
[[3John 1:1](#)].

"The elder." As he did in the second epistle, John adopts the term elder. It could refer to his age. He is in his nineties, and certainly he is a presbyter, an elder, in the sense of age. He is a senior citizen at this time. Also, elder speaks of an officer in the early church, and certainly John could claim that. In fact, he could have claimed more. He could have said, "I am an apostle," but he doesn't do that. Gaius is a friend, and you don't write that way to your friend. At least, I don't write that way to very personal friends. I write to several fellows with whom I was in school and who are old men now -- I'm the only one who has managed to stay young, but they've gotten old! I call each one of them by his first name, and when I sign my name, I don't mention the title Doctor at all -- those fellows would laugh at me. I simply write my name, Vernon or Mac. I was called Mac when I was in college and seminary. I go by that appellation, and so I just sign that way. John is writing to a personal friend, and he simply says, "The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius."

"Unto the well-beloved Gaius" -- I love that. John's letter is addressed to a believer in the early church by the name of Gaius. Gaius was a beloved brother in the church. Four times John calls him "beloved" ([vv. 1,2,5,11](#)). John knows and loves him in the Lord, and he now writes a letter to this brother who apparently is in some local church.

"Whom I love in the truth." Immediately we are told that Gaius is sound in doctrine. He accepted the deity of Christ. Gaius is a man who stood for the truth, and he not only stood for the truth but he also worked for the truth. Here is a man who walked and worked in love. He manifested love. You have to think right if you are going to act right -- that is true in any sphere of life today.

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be  
in health, even as thy soul prospereth [[3John 1:2](#)].

"Beloved" -- John evidently thought a great deal of Gaius and was very close to him since, again, he calls him "beloved."

"I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health." Very frankly, John makes it clear that he wants Gaius to prosper not only financially (he apparently was a man of means), but John also says, "I want you to prosper in your health." Evidently, Gaius was not a well man.

"Even as thy soul prospereth." And John wanted him to prosper also in his soul, to grow spiritually. There are a lot of Christians today who are sick spiritually. They have good health physically, but they have pretty bad health spiritually. It is certainly well for a child of God to have both. Good health physically is wonderful to have -- many of us didn't appreciate it until we lost it. And it is important to have good health spiritually. What physical health is to the body, holiness is to the spiritual life of the believer. To be healthy spiritually is holiness; it is to be growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ.

There were traveling around in that day many men who were teaching the Word of God and doing missionary work. Gaius would open his home to them and entertain them. He was not only a large-hearted man, he not only walked in love, but he also walked in truth,

and he tested these teachers. And in spite of his poor health, he was able to be very active in hospitality.

For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth [[3John 1:3](#)].

Many of these traveling evangelists and missionaries reported to John the graciousness of Gaius and his walk in the truth. They said, "When you go to the church where Gaius is one of the leaders, you will find he is a very wonderful man. He is not only a man of means but also a very generous man. I was entertained in his home." In that day they didn't put the traveling preacher in a Howard Johnson's or a Ramada Inn because there weren't any. If there had been, I believe they would have put him there. But generally, the little inns in the Roman Empire were flea-bitten places, dirty, and sometimes very sinful; so the custom of that day was to entertain these men in homes.

"For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth." This is the testimony that other brethren gave concerning Gaius. This was their judgment of him. "The truth" is actually the doctrine and the teaching of the apostles. The article should be omitted: "walkest in truth." This refers not only to doctrine but also to his conduct. The mark of the believer is to walk in truth. Truth is that which is dominant. The summum bonum for the Christian is whether or not he is walking in the truth and walking in the light. It isn't how you walk but where you walk that is important. Are you walking in the truth? Walking in the truth also means walking in the right conduct or walking in love of the brethren.

Those who were out in a teaching ministry in the early church would come to Gaius' town and to his church, and they would find that his home was wide open to true brethren. Gaius had a spiritual discernment. He could tell who were the genuine believers and who were not. After all, all you need to do is to make sure about a man's relationship to the person of Jesus Christ.

What think ye of Christ? is the test  
To try both your state and your scheme.  
You cannot be right in the rest  
Unless you think rightly of Him.  
-- Author unknown

You must think rightly of Him in order to be right in everything else. These brethren testified, "Brother Gaius tested us out. He found out whether we believed in the deity of Christ. He found out whether we believed in the virgin birth and whether we believed that Christ died a redemptive death upon the Cross and was raised bodily from the grave. When he found out that we did believe these things, he opened his home and received us and discovered that we also had a love for the brethren. And then his heart was open to us." What a marvelous testimony Gaius had!

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth [[3John 1:4](#)].

This is a great comfort This is wonderful encouragement. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." John had been the pastor of the church in Ephesus and had led many to the Lord. It is a great joy to him, now that he is an old man, to hear

that his converts, scattered out over the area of Asia, are still walking in truth. Here again "walking in truth" means walking in right doctrine and in love for the brethren -- his children manifested these things.

It is a great joy to me today to get letters from those who were led to the Lord over the years of my ministry. They say, "We are still walking in the truth," and perhaps they tell about how they are in a Bible church and are attempting to serve the Lord. That brings joy to my heart. When I hear of young ministers who used to be in my classes and who are now standing for the truth, that brings joy to the heart. My daughter is like a great many other young people today. She thinks her dad is just a little old foggy, more or less a back number. The other day she went out to hear a young man whom I had the privilege of teaching. After she and her husband had gone to hear him, she came back to tell me how wonderful he was and what a glorious message he brought. She told me what the message was as if it was something I had never heard before. It did sound strangely familiar, but I never said anything to my daughter -- I just listened as she told me how wonderful it was. Then she said, "You know, Dad, you may not be able to speak to young people today, but he is able to speak to young people, and they listen to him. His church is filled with young people." Well, I couldn't help but smile. I didn't really want to tell her that that fellow's message just happened to be one of my messages. I was glad that he gave it. I am sure that my daughter has heard me give it, but it didn't mean anything when Dad gave it because I'm an old foggy. But this young, sharp boy put in a lot of new words that young people use today that aren't a part of my vocabulary, and of all things, it is just a brand-new message! Do you think I feel badly over that? You do not know what great joy that brought to me in my heart. I know exactly how John felt. John says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." Isn't that wonderful? You cannot help but rejoice in that, especially when you have come to the sundown period of life and you know that your future is no longer ahead of you. My future is behind me, and I rejoice in these young preachers who are coming along. And to feel that maybe I had a little part in their training and to know that young people are crowding in to hear them is a wonderful thing.

Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers [[3John 1:5](#)].

Gaius was evidently one of the children of John, one of John's converts. His conduct conforms to his doctrine, and it is marvelous when that takes place.

From [verse 5](#) to 8, John commends Gaius for having received and entertained the true teachers of the Word. Let me draw the contrast: In 2John the apostle warns against receiving false teachers, but in Third John he encourages the believers to receive the true brethren. Just because you have been deceived and stung for awhile ought not to keep you from receiving the true brethren. I know a lady who supports our radio ministry in a very wonderful way. She is down on the church, and I recently found out why. She happens to be a widow and a very attractive person. She went to a couple of churches where the pastors made a pass at her. Believe me, that turned her off, and she now has nothing to do with the church. Frankly, I have urged her to get into a good Bible church where there are real men of God who will not be doing that sort of thing. Many of us have been disappointed and deceived by false brethren, but we should not let that deter us

from supporting that which we believe is of the Lord. This woman gives support only to radio ministries today. Very frankly, I think she's wrong. I don't think she is wrong to support radio -- don't misunderstand me -- but I do feel that one or two sour experiences ought not to sour you against the church.

John tells us in his second epistle that many deceivers have gone out into the world. Why not be like Gaius and have a little discernment? Don't support anything -- including a church or a radio ministry -- until you are sure that it is of God. Be sure that the Word of God is being given out. Be sure that they love the brethren (and that they don't love the "sistren" too much!). John is talking about things that are very practical today. He is really getting down to the nitty-gritty, right down where the rubber meets the road, right down where the ball hits the bat. He is encouraging Gaius to support the true brethren in the Lord.

Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well [[3John 1:6](#)].

These brethren would return from a trip to John's church. I have a notion that when they came together for the purpose of worship, John would say, "Well, I see Brother So-and-So. He's been out evangelizing, and we'd like to have a word from him. We'd like to have a report as to how the Lord led him and how the Lord blessed him." Brother So-and-So would get up and give his report, and he would say, "When I came to this place there was a brother there by the name of Gaius, and he is a choice servant of God. He opened his home to me, but he doesn't do that for everybody because he certainly examined me. He made an inspection of me to make sure I was teaching the Word of God. He wanted to know whether or not I believed the Word of God and whether or not I was walking in love. He tested me and found that I was, and then he just opened up his heart and home to me, and we had wonderful fellowship." Now John is writing to Gaius, and he says, "I have heard this now from several, and I want you to know how much it delights my heart."

"Whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well." In the second epistle, John says that if you bid Godspeed to false teachers, you are a partaker with them, you are guilty of their deeds. But now he says that if you help those who are giving out the Word of God and who are walking in love, you do well. This is actually something you should be doing. Why? --

Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles [[3John 1:7](#)].

John writes to Gaius, "These brethren went forth, trusting the Lord, and you opened up your home to them. They are genuine, they are real, and you received them." These men went out at great sacrifice. They didn't receive a salary; they didn't receive any remuneration. They went out trusting the Lord, and homes were opened to them. In some places they were given support; in other places they were not.

"Taking nothing of the Gentiles," This my friend, is another way of testing that which is genuine or not. Are you supporting something that is simply a religious racket for money, something that is trying to get every Tom, Dick, and Harry to donate to the cause? Or is it



a work of the Lord that depends on the Lord's people? John says that these true men would take nothing of the Gentiles, that is, from unbelievers.

I always try to make it clear on our radio broadcast that we are just asking believers to support the program. If an unbeliever is listening, we'd rather he not give. We hope he listens; we hope he sends for the literature, but very frankly, I do not really believe God can bless what an unbeliever gives. We believe the scriptural method is to ask only believers to give. These men went forth, taking nothing from the Gentiles. They would not appeal to unbelievers to give to the Lord's work. I know there are many who disagree, but I do not believe that unbelievers should be asked to support the Lord's work. As the ark went through the wilderness, it was carried on the shoulders of the Israelite priests. They could not even put it on a cart. God said that the priests were to carry it. And God's priests today are His believers. Every believer is a priest, and you and I are to carry the Lord Jesus Christ into this world today. Therefore, we do not ask unbelievers to give, but we do ask believers to give -- especially those who not only believe in Christ but who also believe that we are giving out the Word of God today. And we do not apologize for asking believers to give because we believe that the Lord's work is to be carried forward in this method.

We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth [[3John 1:8](#)].

In other words, you would be a partner with these men if you opened your home to them, if you supported them and helped them on their way. In the second epistle, John warns "the elect lady" not to receive apostates into her home because if she does, she is a partner with them in their evil deeds. Now that warning might cause someone just to shut his home and not receive true brethren either; that is, some might shut up their homes to all who might come in order to make sure that they did not entertain false teachers. But John says, "Wait just a minute. If they are men walking in the light, if they are men walking in love, and if they are men who have the life of God within them, you should receive them." I think you can tell when a man is speaking by the Holy Spirit. I am sure there was better discernment in the early church than there is in the church today. I am confident that, although we may know more Bible than they did, we certainly do not have the spiritual discernment that they did. But when a man is doing God's work, he should be supported. "That we might be fellow-helpers to the truth." When Gaius helped them along, he became a partner with them in getting out the Word of God.

### **Diotrephes -- A Dictator (1:9-11)**

Gaius was such a wonderful fellow, one of those choice saints in the early church. You could wish that all of the men in the early church were like that, but I am sorry to have to report that they were not. We come now to another man, Diotrephes, and this is what John has to say of him --

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not [[3John 1:9](#)].

John wrote a pentateuch of the New Testament (just as Moses wrote the Pentateuch of the Old Testament); John wrote a Gospel, the Revelation, and three epistles. That makes five books -- he wrote a pentateuch. If it is true that John wrote his epistles after the Book of

the Revelation, this epistle is his swan song. It was written toward the close of the first century, and by that time, many wonderful believers had been brought into the truth and into the church. We might wonder how they got along. Were they all paragons of virtue? Were they all outstanding men of God? Were they worthy followers of Christ? Well, there were some like Gaius, real men of God, men of courage, outstanding men who stood for the things of God. However, there were also men like this man Diotrephes. He is a very different type of individual from Gaius. The thing that marks Diotrephes is that he loved to have the preeminence. Gaius is the delightful brother, but Diotrephes is the dictator. It is said that he even opposed the apostle John. John had written to this church to receive certain men, among whom was an outstanding preacher of the gospel, one of those unknown saints of God, whose name was Demetrius, but this man Diotrephes would not receive him. As I have mentioned previously, the early Christians practiced hospitality. Peter mentions it in [1Peter 4:9](#), "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." Paul also talks about it in [1Timothy 5:9-10](#); [Romans 12:13](#); and [Titus 1:8](#). I do not know whether Diotrephes was a preacher or a layman in his church, but he would not even open his home to any of these men whom John had recommended. The reason is that he loved to have the preeminence. His motto was "to rule or ruin." He was going to have his own way, and it did not make any difference what the result might be.

In [verse 8](#) John urged, "We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth." May I say to you, there is a real compulsion today upon the child of God to support those who are giving out the Word of God. If you have a preacher who is doing that, you should support him. That was the practice in the early church.

Diotrephes is a man who puts on airs. He is pretentious. He is vainglorious. He struts around as a peacock. He has an overweening ambition. He is puffed up, inflated like a balloon. He is one whom you have to receive with a flourish of trumpets. He comes in in a blaze of glory. That's Diotrephes. John will bring five charges against him: (1) He must occupy the leading place in the church; (2) he actually refused to receive John; (3) he made malicious statements against the apostles; (4) he refused to entertain the missionaries, the ones who were traveling through the country (and the reason obviously is that he wanted to do the speaking and teaching himself); and (5) he excommunicated those who did entertain the missionaries. In other words, Diotrephes wanted to be the first exalted ruler of the church. Woe unto you if you attempted to oppose him. If he was a layman, I sure feel sorry for his pastor. I am of the opinion he tried to keep his pastor under his thumb in order that he could preside. He wanted to be the one to be heard. Diotrephes was a man who was self-opinionated. He was self-exalting instead of self-effacing. I am sure that he would have claimed to have been a self-made man instead of having let the Holy Spirit make him over. He was self-sufficient, and I think he was guilty of self-admiration also. He was self-willed, self-satisfied, and self-confident. He felt that he could do all the teaching and preaching and that he did not need these other men to come and minister.

As I am saying all of this, I wonder if you recognize this fellow. In many churches today, there are men like Diotrephes, men who want to run the church. I am no longer a pastor of a church, and I can say frankly what I think and what I know to be true. I'm not speaking of any theory whatsoever but of what I know from experience over the years. I have met men who, although they put up a very pious front, have tried to run the church.



I have known men like that in churches I have served but, thank the Lord, I never had much trouble with them. Sometimes it is a little clique which will do anything in order to rule. I have watched such people wreck church after church -- a little group or an individual like Diotrephes who loves to have the preeminence.

I am going to say something now that may be very harsh. There are many men who may mean well but who enjoy leading in the church. They enjoy being up before a group of people. For the most part, the ones I have met are almost Bible ignoramuses -- they know very little about the Word of God. But they love to talk, and their talk has actually sometimes caused me to bow my head in shame as I was sitting there on the platform. Some of the things they say are totally unscriptural, totally beside the point, and dead as a doornail. Then they wonder why their church is losing members. They wonder why people are not coming. It is very evident why. There are many who ought to keep quiet in the church. Remember that Paul said, "Study to be quiet" (see [1Thess. 4:11](#)). Instead of trying to teach young people to talk, we ought to teach them to keep quiet because we have many older ones today who talk too much. My friend, we ought not to talk in church unless we have something to say, unless we have something from God to say.

Many folk want to be up front in church. Not only have I met Diotrephes, but I have also met Mrs. Diotrephes in the church today. May I say that there are certain people who ought not to sing solos in the church. They do not bring glory to God, and sometimes they select songs which absolutely hurt the service rather than help it. My friend, you ought to search your heart before God before you stand up in the church and begin to sing or talk. Some soloists like to make a little talk before they sing a song. Many times the message they bring is just about as phony as anything can be. They want to tell you why they are going to sing that particular song. Why not just sing the song? If the song has a message, that is all the message a soloist needs to give.

I say all this because I am deeply concerned. I once had the opportunity to observe the moviemakers out here in Hollywood as they worked on the filming of a scene. When I got tired of watching and left, they had already shot that one scene fifteen times, and they were still working on it! I thought as I left, Oh, if only God's people would work as hard to do everything in the church service to bring glory to the name of Christ! It all deserves the best we've got, my friend.

All of us need to search our hearts -- even the ministers. Why are you presiding? Why are you leading? Why do you sing? Do you love to have the preeminence? Are you doing this for the glory of God? Certainly we need somebody to preside. We need somebody to sing a solo. We need somebody to teach the Word. Many are needed, but search your heart before you do anything because you can wreck a church if you are one like Diotrephes who loves to have the preeminence.

Mrs. McGee and I were ministering in a certain church where they did not have a pastor at the time. When we left after the service, she said to me concerning the man who presided, "He certainly did enjoy presiding, didn't he?" I replied, "Yes, he loved it, and I'm wondering whether they really are seeking for a pastor with that man presiding." He was not only presiding, he was killing the church. The attendance was way down. I felt

very sorry for the pastor who would come to the church because he certainly was going to have trouble with that individual.

John now says that he is going to deal with this problem --

Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth,  
prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith,  
neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them  
that would, and casteth them out of the church [[3John 1:10](#)].

"Wherefore, if I come" -- I do not think this is the if of doubt. We shall see at the end of the epistle that John intends to come and he is coming. But we never know what a day will bring forth. John says, "If I come," in the sense of, "If something should come up, if something should happen, I might be unable to make the trip." But his intentions are to come. There is no doubt in his mind about that.

"I will remember his deeds which he doeth." In Christianity, the important word is truth, and truth manifests itself in love -- it is just as simple as that and as important as that. Diotrephes loved to have the preeminence which, by the way, is a characteristic of the flesh. The fruit of the Spirit is meekness, but Diotrephes was a dictator. Meekness does not necessarily mean weakness or cowardice. Someone has said, "Silence is golden, but sometimes it is yellow." It is too bad there weren't those in the church who spoke out against Diotrephes. Moses was considered a meek man, but when he got up and talked to the children of Israel, he didn't sound like a meek man according to our notion of meekness. He spoke with the authority God had given him. The Lord Jesus was meek and lowly, but He went in and cleansed the temple. This is the reason I feel I should speak out on this because nobody else speaks along these lines as far as I know. When this thing is hurting our churches, somebody should say, "Look, brother, sit down. You are spoiling things. You ought not to be loving the preeminence all the time. You should learn to be meek and let others speak." John says, "Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth." Diotrephes exhibits that which is not the mark of a believer, by any means. He apparently did not have the truth.

"Prating against us with malicious words." Diotrephes was attempting to completely destroy the effectiveness of the apostles and especially of John. John says, "When I get there, I'm going to deal with him. I'm going to speak out against him. I'm going to let it be known that this man is using malicious words."

A man called me sometime ago who was a member of a church that I served at one time. He wept as he said, "I want you to forgive me for saying the things I said about you." He had gone so far as to say that I had left the church in debt. I have never left in debt any church that I have served. The fact of the matter is that I left that church with a tremendous reserve fund, but he, along with a few others, simply did not mention that. As a result, a false report went out. I told him, "You don't have to ask me to forgive you. You need to ask the Lord's forgiveness." He said, "I've already repented and talked to Him." I told him, "It would be nice if you would now give the true report to those you gave the false report." He had been a Diotrephes. He enjoyed presiding. He enjoyed having his way. Apparently, a change has come over him now. He is in another church, and I understand that he is doing a good job. I rejoice in that. But he was a Diotrephes. I feel

that I should have dealt with him more severely than I did when I was there because John says, "I intend to deal with Diotrephes."

"And not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church." Imagine this fellow! He is excommunicating anybody who would entertain these men John had recommended. What a horrible picture this is! If you want to wreck a church, just have a man like this or a little group like this and, my friend, you will wreck the church. The sad situation is that there are too many men like this today in Christian circles.

You can call John an apostle of love if you want to, but the Lord Jesus called him a son of thunder. I think they had a regular thunderstorm when John arrived at this church because he said he was going to deal with Diotrephes. It is too bad other churches don't deal with Diotrephes, because he will wreck a church if he is permitted to go on.

Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God [[3John 1:11](#)].

John encourages Gaius to continue doing that which is good. Again, he emphasizes that the one who practices righteousness is a child of God but the one who does not practice righteousness is not born of God.

### **Demetrius -- A Dependable Brother (1:12-14)**

We come now to the third man, Demetrius. He is a lovely fellow. You just cannot help but rejoice in him. Gaius is a delightful brother, Diotrephes is a dictator, and now we will find Demetrius to be a dependable brother.

Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true [[3John 1:12](#)].

"Demetrius hath good report of all men and of the truth itself." Here is a man sound in the faith. "Yea, and we also bear record." In the mouth of two witnesses, a thing is established. Demetrius has a good report of all men; the truth bears witness to him, and John says, "I bear witness also." "And ye know that our record is true." This church knows that John bears a true witness.

Demetrius is obviously one of these wonderful saints of God whom Diotrephes had shut out of the church. We have only one verse about Demetrius -- this is all we know. He is never mentioned again in Scripture. However, this one verse of Scripture gives us an insight into the Christian character of this noble saint of God. We cannot identify him with any other of the same name. His name means "belonging to Demeter," that is, Ceres, the goddess of agriculture. This identifies him as a convert from paganism. He evidently was brought up in a pagan home and worshiped the gods of the Greeks and Romans. This man, converted, now goes around teaching the Word of God. He adorned the doctrine of Christ. Others testified to his character, and he was true to the doctrine of Scripture.

Demetrius is evidently among the group of men whom John mentions that Diotrephes was not receiving. He is one of the itinerant preachers who went about in the first century

-- humble, unknown, and unsung. He is a member of that great army which carried the gospel throughout the Roman Empire so that it could be said that the whole world had heard the gospel. The whole Roman world of that day, the whole civilized world, was entirely evangelized. They were pushing out beyond its borders when the apostasy began to set in, when there came in men like Diotrefes.

Demetrius is one of the shining lights of the New Testament, a humble saint of God. Around us today, there are multitudes of people like him. They are not a Diotrefes. And they are not even a Gaius -- they are not outstanding Christians. They are just humble saints of God, doing the thing God has called them to do. In a humble way, they are maybe just teaching a little Sunday school class. I heard the other day about one who teaches the handicapped. How wonderful that is, but nobody knows about her. Nobody has ever given her a loving cup. They ought to, but they never have. She doesn't want it, and she would be embarrassed if you gave her one. There are many saints of God like that today. God is using them in a small way. They are not trying to be the chief soloist; they are just singing in the choir. They don't try to be the main speaker. They don't want to preside. They don't want to be the chairman of every board in the church. They are willing just to fade into the woodwork of the church. But they are pillars of the church. They are supporting the work, and they are encouraging the preacher.

One of the most wonderful church members I ever knew was a dear little lady who came in every Sunday morning on a cane. She never missed a Sunday morning, and she always had something nice to say. She was always encouraging the preacher. She told me one time, "I think that's my job. It's all I can do." Well, she did other things, too. The church is filled with wonderful saints of God. Don't get the impression that I think that everybody in the church is a Diotrefes. Thank God that there are very few of them. In this epistle here, it is two good men to one bad. I think the average is better than that today in the church -- I think maybe it is one hundred to one. Thank God for the Demetrius folk in our churches today.

The tense that John uses here indicates that Demetrius had a good reputation in the past and that he still has a good reputation. Over a long period, Demetrius has demonstrated a time-tested faith. He is Demetrius, the dependable brother. The church knows him as a man of God. Now you might deceive the church, but Demetrius was tested by the truth. He measures up to the definition of a believer. John knows him and agrees. There are three witnesses to the fact that Demetrius adorns the doctrine of Christ.

The real test of the Christian life is not in the arena backed by applause. It was not before the crowd in the Colosseum. There were five million martyrs who bore testimony to the truth of the gospel in the first three centuries and who laid down their lives for Christ. Did you know that there were many more millions who bore witness by the faithful lives they lived each day? Nothing spectacular, nothing sensational, nothing outstanding -- they just lived for God. They had a purpose, they had a direction, and they had a thrilling experience. (Our contemporary civilization is experiencing a decadence that characterized Rome in the first century. After World War II, an Englishman wrote the play, *Look Back in Anger*. It revealed a bottomless pessimism without any hope for the future. This attitude produced the Beatle-brained mob of youth we have today who are without direction. Three young people I met in Athens told me they simply wanted to

drop out of society.) Into the decadent first century, with its low morals and erosion of character, there came the message from God that He had given His Son. There were multitudes who came into contact with Him, and they got involved. May I say to you, you may not find their names in the Yellow Pages, but you will find them in the Lamb's Book of Life. They lived for God unknown to the world, and they died unknown to the world. But they are known to God, and their names are inscribed on high.

I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee [[3John 1:13](#)].

Though he wrote the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation, two of the longest books of the New Testament, John very frankly says he would much rather tell it to you than write it to you.

But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name [[3John 1:14](#)].

Someday this will be true for you and me: we will be able to speak face to face with John. I want to talk with him about these little books he wrote. There are a lot of questions I want to ask him. But, of course, he is referring to the fact that he will come and speak face to face with these men of the first century. He will speak face to face with Diotrephes. I feel sorry for old Diotrephes -- I'm sure he really got it in that day. And John will speak to Gaius and Demetrius, those wonderful men of God. He says, "We shall speak face to face."

"Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name." Isn't that a lovely way to end this letter? John says, "I want you to know that our friends who are here with me greet you. And will you greet the friends by name? Go and say to Demetrius, 'Demetrius, I have a message from John. He wanted to greet you and to tell you he will be coming our way before long.' "

Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius -- these are the three men who pass before us in this little epistle. Christianity was on trial in the first century. Two of these men who are mentioned in this epistle are genuine. They are real and wonderful children of God. One is a delightful brother; another is a dependable brother. But the third is a dictator and a phony. May I say to you, the gospel walked in shoe leather in the first century in the Roman Empire. And it needs to get down where the rubber meets the road in our day. In spite of any energy shortage, we need to get the gospel onto the highways and byways of life.

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